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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 004063

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2014

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER REGRETS UNHELPFUL MOD
COMMENTS, SEEKS TO PUT RELATIONS BACK ON TRACK

REF: EMBASSY MADRID E-MAIL TO EUR/WE OF OCTOBER 14

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

DFM Leon Agrees that Bono's Comments Were Unhelpful

11. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Bernardino Leon told DCM Manzanares Oct. 14 that he agreed that DefMin Bono's comments last week about US-Spain relations and the US role in the Spanish National Day Parade were extremely unhelpful. Leon promised there would be no further comments from President Zapatero that could be construed as anti-American, but that Bono was hard to control (note: Bono is a skilled politician who loves publicity and is known for his long-winded public comments). Leon said, however, that the Ambassador's non-attendance at the King's National Day reception -- however taken out of context by the press -- had struck a difficult chord in the government.

DCM Confirms Ambassador Had No Intention of Snubbing the King

12. (C) Manzanares responded that the Ambassador had no intention to snub the King or the Spanish people, and had in fact spoken with the King who was understanding of the Ambassador's difficulty in attending the reception as well as the Ambassador's prior decision, known to the GOS, not to attend the National Day parade. Manzanares told Leon that comments from senior government officials that put the issue in the most negative light possible were very unhelpful, and reached Washington just as fast as they reached the press in Madrid. Manzanares said the perception both in Madrid and Washington is that the current government exhibits very strong anti-Americanism, though we do not think that it is the intent of the government to portray itself in this way.

13. (C) Leon said that there exists in Spain not so much anti-Americanism per se, but a broad anti-Bush administration sentiment, focused not on personalities but on policy. Manzanares asked Leon how the Zapatero government planned to put itself right with either a new Bush administration or a Kerry administration, noting that democracies need to come to terms with one another no matter which government was in power.

U.S. Policies Post-Election

14. (C) Manzanares noted that even if another party wins the U.S. election, most of our foreign policy challenges - Iraq, Iran, counter-terrorism, etc. will remain the same, so that the Spanish government needs to come to terms with this and find ways to put the relationship back on track. Leon said that the U.S. should look at Spain's actions more than recent words. For example, Leon said that Spain sent over 1000 troops to Afghanistan -- a large deployment for Spain -- as a sign of goodwill toward the U.S. Manzanares replied that we very much appreciated Spain's participation in Afghanistan, but there need to be more signals. Leon promised there would be other such signs. Manzanares noted that the U.S. was not concerned about Spain's desire to move toward what Spain saw as the "heart of Europe." The U.S. believes Europeans can remain close to the U.S. as well as their European counterparts.

Leon Offers to Publicly Stress U.S.-Spain Cooperation

15. (C) What we object to, Manzanares continued, is being the "political football" Spain uses as it seeks to reinforce its European policy. "Anti-Americanism is not a foreign policy," Manzanares said. Leon agreed, and asked if it would be helpful if he would draft a public statement (or op/ed) highlighting the importance of U.S.-Spanish cooperation. Manzanares said that would be very helpful and would welcome the idea of such a piece by the Spanish government.

U.S. Has Been Patient

16. (C) Reviewing relations since the March 14 elections, Manzanares underscored that the US had been very patient and

mature these last few months. The U.S. has refrained from responding to aggressive anti-US rhetoric as we looked for the new government to settle in, become more experienced and as we ourselves focused on our longer-term interests in Spain. Continued anti-U.S. rhetoric from high GOS levels, however, was forcing us to reconsider this restraint and respond more aggressively. Leon said he understood and hoped that this would not be necessary. Returning to the theme of Zapatero's comments, such as those in Tunis several weeks ago, Manzanares asked Leon why Zapatero had not taken the opportunity to retract his statements after Secretary Powell had spoken to FM Moratinos. Leon said that Zapatero had not intended the remarks the way they were taken and pointed to comments Zapatero had made in Bilbao the following day as being pro-American. Manzanares pointed out that we had not seen these comments in Bilbao and they were not highlighted in the press here.

Other issues:

16. (C) Cuba: Leon said the GOS did not want a wholesale change in the EU policy toward Cuba, but rather to modify it somewhat to allow EU Ambassadors and diplomats access to Castro and other Cuban officials in order to press home the need for reform. Leon underscored there were no personal relations with Castro among members of the Socialist government in the way that existed during the previous Socialist government under Felipe Gonzalez. Leon said if the other Europeans did not agree with Spain on the Cuba issue, Spain would not adopt a unilateral policy.

17. (C) Western Sahara: Leon noted the excellent meeting he had had with A/S Burns several weeks ago in which they discussed Western Sahara. He said that Spanish and U.S. positions were relatively the same, and pointed to the French position -- embodied by Chirac himself -- as being the problem in finding a way forward. Leon characterized Chirac's position in support of Rabat as "stronger than that of the King of Morocco." He pledged to continue to work with the USG on the issue.

ARGYROS